

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY THE CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE
Transcriber's Office
FLOOR DEBATE

March 19, 2003 LB 608

workers will have an occupational hazard or injury in this work, so they are certainly at risk, which is why, when there are OSHA violations, as there have been at the Nebraska Beef operation in Omaha where, in the middle of the day, they shut off the water supply, they shut off the water fountains, happened to be an OSHA charge, they did that because they were selling the workers water. Shut off the workers' water fountains so they could sell them water. OSHA violation. By the way, same plant has 41 unfair labor practices. It's one of the rare ones in which they're attempting to unionize or have unionized, and they include 41 injunctions. We have ConAgra's operation that has NLRB complaint in which they filmed union organizing efforts at the plant, in violation of federal law. Our starting wages at ConAgra, Swift in Omaha, is about \$8. In Greater Omaha it's \$8. In Excel in Schuyler it's \$8.50. In Nebraska Beef in Omaha it's \$7.50. Twenty years ago those numbers were higher, and the high wages certainly were significantly higher. Tyson Company, which now has taken over IBP, has been...has a history of coming into operations that are unionized and finding a way to undo the operation. And, in fact, although this story doesn't occur in Nebraska, it is indicative of this employer who is poised to make a LB 775 application should they wish to. In one of their firms, in one of their headquarters, as a matter of fact, not their headquarters, I'm sorry, one of their plants not in this state their recent offer to the union was a pay cut of 73 cents an hour, a four-year wage freeze, an increase in their healthcare costs, higher deductibles, higher out-of-pocket expenses, a freeze on benefit packages, and a 50 percent reduction in sick leave and a two-week reduction in vacation benefits. Now the union, in resisting that, is going to have a knock-down-drag-out fight. But in the end you know what's going to happen? They're going to bust the union and they're going to go down to this kind of labor, which is highly vulnerable and highly exploitable, which is what happens in this marketplace on occasion, and a disturbing number of occasions. For example, with respect to our own DEQ and our environmental plant, meat packing operations of the IBP were challenged because of false reporting compliance with environmental regulations in a class action lawsuit. This happened to be a Nebraska IBP LB 775 receiver. Federal lawsuit said that the IBP issued a series of misleading statements concerning the compliance with state and